Hamilton Field, Photographic Laboratory
(Facility No. 455)
7th Street between Escolta and Hangar Avenues
Novato
Marin County
California

HABS No. CA-2398-AA

HABS
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California

HABS
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21-NOVA,
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HAMILTON FIELD
Photographic Laboratory
(Facility No. 455)

HABS No. CA-2398-AA

Location: Hamilton Army Air Field
Novato, Marin County, California
Photographic Laboratory
Facility No. 455 (7th Street between Escolta and Hangar Avenues)

U.S.G.S.: Novato, CA. Quadrangle (7.5' series), 1954 (revised 1980)
Petaluma Point, CA. Quadrangle (7.5' series), 1959 (revised 1980)
UTM Coordinates: Zone 10; A: 542100/4213620; B: 544720/4212220;
C: 542760/4210650; D: 541040/4212600

Present Owner: General Services Administration, Washington, D. C.

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Statement of Significance:

The base Photographic Laboratory, also referred to as the PMT lab, was used as a training facility as well as the developing and printing facility for all official photo documentation made on and off the base. It is an example of the application of an important architectural trend (Spanish Colonial Revival) adapted to reflect California's Mission heritage in a departure from traditional military architecture.

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398) for a comprehensive Statement of Significance and individual report HABS No. CA-2398-F for a condensed general Statement of Significance.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: The contract was awarded on December 4, 1933, and construction on the base Photographic Laboratory was completed on July 28, 1934 (Hamilton Facility Cards 1957-1971).

2. Architect: Hamilton Field was designed under the guidance of Captain Howard B. Nurse, Construction Quartermaster. He was assisted by a corps of civilians headed by H. P. Spencer, Chief Architect, and F. W. Salfinger, Chief Engineer. Captain F. C. Petes and Lieutenant J. H. Veal of the Quartermaster's Corps were detailed to Marin County by the War Department to assist Nurse (*Novato Advance* May 2B, 1932). Landscaping efforts were directed by C. C. Stevens, a local landscape engineer, using plantings chosen by Nurse and donated by Marin County citizens.

3. Original Owner: Hamilton Field is on land originally owned by private individuals and companies. In 1930, the California Packing Company sold 630 acres of land to Marin County to use to entice the Army to build on the site. An additional 161 acres were purchased from Dr. T. Peter and Julia Bodkin. These parcels were combined with other County-owned land, and in 1932 Marin County sold a 927-acre parcel of land to the Department of the Army for $1.00 for use by the Army Air Corps as an air field. In 1947 Hamilton Air Field was transferred to the newly-formed U. S. Air Force and renamed Hamilton Air Force Base. In 1974 the U. S. Congress declared the installation excess to military needs and closed the base (Maniery et al. 1993). The lab was transferred to General Services Administration in 1974 and was sold to private developers as excess property.

4. Builder, Contractor, Supplier: The Photographic Laboratory was built by Azevedo and Sarmento of Sacramento. Their winning bid was for $3B,900.00 and the lab, when completed, cost $37,023.05.

5. Original Plans and Construction: The original ink on linen drawings made by Nurse's staff have been destroyed. Copies of Nurse's plans are on file at the National Archives, Pacific Division, San Bruno, CA. and the Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, Novato.

6. Alterations/Additions: This building has had minor alterations done primarily as general maintenance. Some light fixtures have been replaced and new air conditioners have replaced the original units.

B. Historical Context:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398) and Section B in report HABS No. CA-2398-F.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Nurse and his team of architects designed reinforced concrete buildings covered with white stucco and red tile roofs and other features such as arcades and ornamental door surrounds in a basic Spanish Colonial Revival style. This style was used by Captain Nurse at Randolph Field in Texas and by other Army architects at various bases (Fine and Remington 1972:48; Thomason and Associates 1993). Captain Nurse blended the standard Colonial Revival design with elements borrowed from Moorish, Spanish Churriguerresque, Mission, and Art Moderne styles, creating a unique Spanish Eclectic look.

The primary method of construction for the administrative and industrial buildings was reinforced concrete covered with stucco exteriors and Mission tile or composition roofs. Foundations of all buildings were constructed of concrete reinforced with steel bars in consideration of the seismic activity of the region. Buildings in the administrative and industrial areas were built using concrete and wood piers for support in a response to their construction on reclaimed salt marsh.

2. Condition of fabric: The Photographic Laboratory is in excellent condition, except for some deterioration from years of vacancy. Doors and some windows are boarded, vegetation is overgrown, and some interior ceiling acoustical tiles have fallen to the floor.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The Photographic Laboratory is a one-story rectangular building measuring 41 feet by 117 feet and has 4,485 square feet of useable space.

2. Foundation: Foundation is reinforced concrete perimeter with reinforced concrete-covered slabs supported on concrete ground beams and piers. A three-inch layer of rock fill is on top of the ground beams and slabs, and the concrete subfloor was poured on top of the rock fill. The base of the foundation is 12 inches thick.

3. Walls: The exterior walls are 10-inches thick and are made of reinforced concrete with a smooth cementitious stucco finish. Exterior detailing consists of a decorative cast concrete cornice and foundation line, chamfered corners on the walls, projecting

cast "stone" sills beneath the windows, and a cast "stone" band course connecting pairs of arched windows.

4. Structural systems, framing: The attic has two-inch by four-inch studs with rafter beams. Steel I-beams support a concrete platform around a ceiling recess in the old supply room and that was used for storage.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: The primary entrance, located on the northeast facade, is recessed and consists of a small porch with concrete floor. The porch roof is covered with mission tile and supported with stuccoed concrete pilasters that flank the central door. The recessed rear entry consists of a concrete stoop and porch with metal handrail and is also flanked with stucco-covered concrete pilasters.

6. Chimneys: There are six small metal vent pipes and a turbo-type ventilator spaced along the roof line. A rectangular stucco-covered chimney is located in the center rear of the building. It is pierced by four, four-inch tile pipes on each side. A Mission tile gable roof and a band course provide decoration to the chimney. It is anchored to the roof with an iron brace and a copper cricket.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways/doors: The central front doorway has one glass light above a decorative recessed panel. The rear door also has one light and a simple recessed panel. Original two panel wood screen doors with butt hinges cover each entry door.

b. Windows/shutters: The paired windows on the front facade and on the corners of the northwest elevation are steel casement with eight lights on each window and Palladian arches with six lights. The nine windows on the southeast elevation and the eight central ones on the northwest and one on the rear are eight light steel sash rectangular casement. The bathroom windows on the southeast side of the building are identical to the other rectangular windows but contain obscured glass.

8. Roof:

a. Shape/covering: The roof is end gabled and covered with terra cotta Mission tile with a Mission tile ridge line.

b. Cornice/eaves: A decorative cast concrete cornice extends along the sides of the building, immediately beneath the eaves. The gutter systems consist of metal troughs leading to decorative scuppers and downspouts with crown molding. Cast concrete back splashes are located at the bottom of the downspouts.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

a. Basement: There is no basement.

b. First Floor: The primary access to the building is provided through central entrances on the southwest and northeast ends. The floor plans consist of a central double loaded corridor with an office and photo developing, loading, copying, enlarging, drying, mosaic, and other laboratory and chemical and equipment storage rooms. The original refrigeration room has been converted to a mechanical equipment room, but the others appear original. A vault is loceted off the office.

c. Attic: A portion of the attic over the supply room is finished to provide additional storage space. The remainder of the attic is open.

2. Flooring: Subflooring for the entire building is reinforced concrete slab. The office, supply room, corridor, and other rooms in the front section of the building are covered with speckled brown and beige eight-inch asphalt tile, but originally were concrete. The rooms in the rear section of the building are covered with one-inch and two-inch ceramic tiles; some of these rooms have central drains in the floor.

Latrines have one-inch and two-inch ceramic tile floors laid in a decorative pattern.

3. Wall/ceiling finish: The walls and supporting columns in the building are clad in four-inch by eight-inch yellow-glazed ceramic tile laid horizontally, with rust-colored tile baseboards. Bathrooms have four-inch square ceramic tile walls with a black tile bullnose and baseboard. The upper walls are plaster over lathe. Ceilings are covered with gypsum, except for the supply room, which is peaked to the gable with a metal lathe and plaster ceiling. The supply room walls are also metal lathe and plaster. The vault walls are eight-inch-thick concrete with a four-inch layer of cork insulation, covered with a two-inch layer of terra cotta tile. The printing, refrigeration, and aerial film development room walls are insulated with a four-inch layer of cork. The vault ceiling consists of a three and one-half inch gypsum slab covered by four-inch cork insulation coated with plaster.

4. Openings:

a. Doorways/doors: Interior doors in the Photographic Laboratory consist of double three panel wooden doors separating the front and rear sections of the building, the mosaic work room, and copying room; and single three panel wooden doors to the other rooms and office. All have glass transoms. The vault has a self-closing insulated door.

b. Windows: Fixed glass transoms above interior doors provide some light to the central corridor.

5. Decorative features/trim: No significant decorative trim was noted.

6. Hardware: The exterior front door has a brass thumblatch lock. Standard interior door hardware consists of a circular knob and lock set with half mortise door hinge. The Sergeant locks are of the "Yale" type. The original brass electric switch and plug plates are extant.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: A gas-fired "Ideal" boiler provided steam for radiators located in each room. Radiators were made by the American Radiator Company. A natural gas "Fraser" free-standing heater is in the supply room. Wall-mounted air conditioning units are also present.

b. Ventilation: Ventilation for the structure is through decorative cast stone louvers in the gable ends. These louvers are rectangular, slightly recessed, and have a "honeycomb" pattern. They are backed with copper mesh screens. There are also terra cotta pipe roof ventilation and one modern turbo-type ventilator. The enlarging and printing rooms had floor-level eight-inch by 24-inch metal louver vents with metal hoods.

c. Lighting: The original lighting consisted of "schoolhouse" fixtures with a canopy and milk glass bowl shade. They are extant in the hallway and in one room. Original brass wall sconces with canopy and chain are present in the mosaic work room. Other lighting fixtures in the building have been replaced with two-tube fluorescent lights. Exterior lighting consists of metal wall sconces with wire cage bulb protectors that flank the entry doors.

d. Plumbing: The building has numerous steel sinks and two bathrooms, one connected to the office and one by the copying room. Each bathroom contains a "Standard" flush valve toilet and wall-mounted sink. Long wash sinks extend along the walls of the washing, printing, and enlarging room. Small wash basins are also present.

9. Original Furnishings: Original wooden cupboards and shelving are located in the supply, camera storage, and chemical storage rooms. A vault is located between the office and the copying room. The supply room once had floor-to-ceiling shelves accessed by a moveable ladder on a metel track.

D. Site:

1. General site orientation: The primary facade of the building faces northeast, with the long northwest side facing 7th Street. The Photographic Laboratory is located in the original Spanish Colonial Revival district of Hamilton Army Air Field on a flat site that is surrounded by rolling hills, fitting within a grid system adjacent to the flight field. A parking lot is located behind the building, on its southeast side.

2. Historic landscape design: Captain Nurse's overall plan for base design included thoughtful use of rock walls, terracing, and plantings to create a visual effect that was continued, in a more limited fashion, during World War II. Rock terracing throughout the original base served to simultaneously separate individual residences while visually uniting various sections of the base into an overall city-like plan. They were built as part of the final phase of original post construction in 1935 (Hamilton Official Photographs 1934-1935). Foundation and accent plantings, tree-lined streets, and retention of natural oak groves and rolling hills complement the rock work.

The majority of buildings in the administration area have some landscaping, particularly around the NCO barracks. Street trees, such as Modesto ash, camphor, and various palms, are present throughout this area. Building corner and doorways are delimited by a number of conifers, the most prominent being sawara false cypress and Italian cypress. Accent trees include coast redwood and some red ironbark, which were incorporated into divider triangles and sometimes near entrances. California and Mexican fan palms and golden bamboo were prominent framers of entrances, as was the New Zealand draceaena. Foundation plantings are quite diverse and include mock orange, flowering quince, Portugal laurel, and Manukka tea tree. Japanese privet, Hollywood juniper, and heavenly bamboo appear to have been added subsequent to the late 1930s and were not part of the original landscape design on base.

Building 455 is surrounded by foundation shrubbery and separated from the Guardhouse (Building 456) by a lawn. It is accessed by concrete walkways from the sidewalk on 7th Street and from the parking lot.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398). Copies of Nurse's plans for this building are filed at the National Archives, Pacific Division, San Bruno, CA. and the Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, Novato.

B. Historic Maps and Views:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

C. Interviews:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

D. Bibliography:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

Sources cited in this individual report are listed below.

Fine, Jesse, and Lenore Remington
1972 *Army Corps of Engineers: Construction in the U.S.* U.S. Army and World War II, Office of Military History.

Hamilton Facility Cards
1957-1971 Maintenance Cards for Base Facilities. On file, Hamilton Army Air Field Installation Office, Novato, and Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, Novato.

Maniery, Mary L., Leslie R. Fryman, and Fred Hrusa
1993 *National Register of Historic Places Evaluation, Hamilton Army Air Field Historic District, Marin County, California.* Submitted to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District.

Thomason and Associates
1993 *Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.* Cultural Resource Survey, Final Report. Nashville, Tennessee. On file, State Office of Historic Preservation, Austin, Texas.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

F. Supplemental Material:

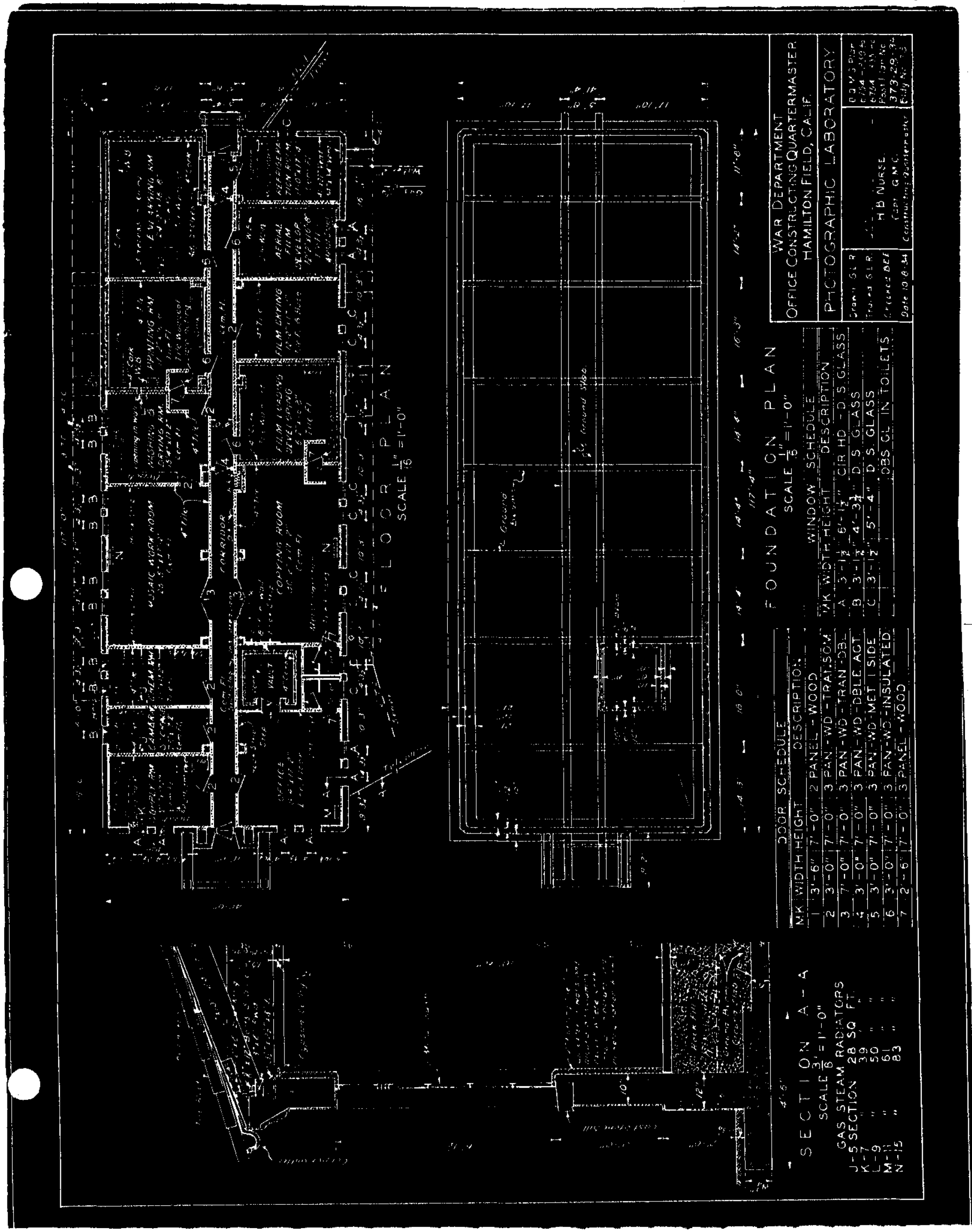
Copies of representative floor plans of Facility No. 455, dated in the 1930s and prepared by the Quartermaster's General Office are attached to this form.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Hamilton Army Air Field is owned by various federal entities including the Department of the Navy, Department of the Army, United States Coast Guard, and General Services Administration. The Army/GSA parcels are being excessed and sold to private developers. The Navy property is included in Base Closure and Realignment actions.

As part of the Army's undertaking, it has been determined in consultation with the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) that the excess sale will have an affect on properties at the air field, and that these properties are components of a district that is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Based on consultation with the OHP and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, pursuant to 36 CFR part 800, regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470f), a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was entered into by the interested parties in March 1994. The agreement stipulated that prior to excess sale the Army must contact the HABS/HAER division at the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service, San Francisco, California, to determine the appropriate level and kind of recordation for the subject properties. The MOA further stipulated that copies of the documentation be made available to the OHP and appropriate local archives designated by the OHP. This recordation has been prepared in order to meet those stipulations.

The title page, Part I, and Part III were prepared by Mary L. Maniery, Historian, PAR Environmental Services, Sacramento. Architectural descriptions in Part II were compiled by Judith Marvin, Historian/Architectural Historian, Foothill Resources, Murphys, California. Descriptions were checked against photographs and plans by Mary L. Maniery and were embellished and corrected, as necessary. Information on historic landscape design was extracted by Mary L. Maniery from a report prepared by Dr. Fred Hrusa, Botanist, PAR Environmental Services. Photography was prepared by David DeVries, Mesa Technical, Berkeley, California.


FLOOR PLAN
SCALE 1/16" = 1'-0"
FOUNDATION PLAN
SCALE 1/16" = 1'-0"
SECTION A - A
SCALE 3/16" = 1'-0"
GAS STEAM RADIATORS
J-5 SECTION 28 SQ FT
K-7 39
L-9 50
M-11 61
N-15 83
DOOR SCHEDULE
MK WIDTH HEIGHT DESCRIPTION
1 3'-6" 7'-0" 2 PANEL - WOOD
2 3'-0" 7'-0" 3 PAN - WD - TRAN. SGL
3 7'-0" 7'-0" 3 PAN - WD - TRAN - DBL
4 3'-0" 7'-0" 3 PAN - WD - DBLE ACT
5 3'-0" 7'-0" 3 PAN - WD - MET 1 SIDE
6 3'-0" 7'-0" 3 PAN - WD - INSULATED
7 2'-6" 7'-0" 3 PANEL - WOOD
WINDOW SCHEDULE
MK WIDTH HEIGHT DESCRIPTION
A 3'-1½" 6'-1½" CIR HD - D S GLASS
B 3'-1½" 4'-3½" D S GLASS
C 3'-1½" 5'-4" D S GLASS
OBS GL IN TOILETS
CORRIDOR
COPYING ROOM
VAULT
OFFICE
WAR DEPARTMENT
OFFICE CONSTRUCTING QUARTERMASTER
HAMILTON FIELD, CALIF.
PHOTOGRAPHIC LABORATORY
H B NURSE
Capt. Q.M.C.
Constructing Quartermaster